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The Strategic Role of Guru Penggerak in Enhancing Learning Creativity within the Merdeka Curriculum in Primary Education

Dameria Sinaga[1] & Melda Rumia Rosmery Simorangkir[2*]

[1]*Education Administration Management, Graduate School, Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia.* [2]*Department of Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Education, Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia. Email: meldasimorangkir82@gmail.com**

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ABSTRACT

Studies on the role of Guru Penggerak in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary education are essential to obtain empirical insights into the program's contribution to improving learning quality. This study aims to analyze the strategic role of Guru Penggerak in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning, curriculum flexibility, and the strengthening of character education and 21st-century competencies. This research employed a qualitative method with a descriptive phenomenological approach grounded in the social definition paradigm. The study was conducted at SDN Cakung Timur 09 Pagi, Jakarta, Indonesia. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that Guru Penggerak possess a comprehensive understanding of the concepts and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, as reflected in the implementation of project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and the integration of technology in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, Guru Penggerak actively contribute to creating a conducive learning environment, fostering students' creativity, and strengthening collaboration and a positive learning culture within the school. These findings affirm that Guru Penggerak play a strategic role as agents of change in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary education.

Keywords: Strategic; Role; Guru Penggerak; Enhancing; Learning; Creativity; Merdeka Curriculum; Primary Education.

1. Introduction

Since 2016, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia has implemented various teacher training policies as a strategic effort to improve the quality of national education. These policies are aimed at strengthening teachers' professional, pedagogical, social, and personal competencies so that they are able to respond to the increasingly complex challenges of educational system change. Nevertheless, evaluation results indicate that teacher competencies in Indonesia still require significant improvement. Based on data from the 2019 Regional Education Balance (Neraca Pendidikan Daerah), the average score of the Teacher Competency Test (Uji Kompetensi Guru/UKG) was recorded at 57 out of 100 (Mahadi & Konadi, 2020), indicating a gap between the expected level of competence and actual conditions in the field.

In response to this condition, the government enacted the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia Number 26 of 2022 concerning Guru Penggerak (Driving Teachers) Education. This regulation serves as a foundation for strengthening the role of teachers as agents of change within the educational ecosystem. Article 1 paragraph (2) stipulates that Guru Penggerak are teachers who have obtained certification through a structured education and training process (Lubis et al., 2023). The Guru Penggerak Education Program is comprehensively designed, encompassing online training, workshops, conferences, and continuous mentoring, with the objective of developing teachers who demonstrate instructional leadership, innovation, and reflective practice in carrying out their professional duties.

In line with this policy, the government has also implemented the Merdeka Curriculum as a new paradigm in the organization of learning within educational institutions (Alimuddin, 2023). The primary objective of the Merdeka

Curriculum is to provide teachers with greater autonomy to optimize student-centered learning, accommodate diverse learning needs, and encourage the holistic development of students' potential (Irhamsyah, 2023). Student-centered learning not only emphasizes academic achievement but also prioritizes the creation of a safe, inclusive, and supportive school climate, as well as reflective and sustainable learning practices (Azzahra & Rahmadhani, 2025). In this context, the presence of Guru Penggerak becomes a key factor in fostering innovation and creativity in learning in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in primary education. Guru Penggerak are expected to initiate changes in instructional practices, develop contextual learning strategies, and build a collaborative learning culture (Satriawan, Santika, & Naim, 2021).

Studies examining the role of Guru Penggerak in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary education are therefore essential to obtain empirical evidence regarding the program's contribution to improving learning quality. As instructional leaders, Guru Penggerak are expected to implement the Merdeka Curriculum effectively in addressing various educational challenges in Indonesia, such as low student engagement, limited instructional innovation, and the suboptimal use of technology in teaching and learning processes (Mulyasa, 2021; Rahmawati, 2023; Maulidina et al., 2024). Their presence constitutes a critical element in driving learning transformation toward more adaptive, contextual, and learner-oriented practices (Putri, Nurfebriyani, & Pribadi, 2023).

Guru Penggerak are an integral component of the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) policy, which provides the conceptual foundation for the design and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in the use of flexible, differentiated, and student-centered learning methods. In practice, Guru Penggerak do not merely function as curriculum implementers but also act as innovators and agents of change who initiate creative instructional practices and cultivate a reflective culture within schools (Hasanah, Adha, & Mentari, 2022). This role requires strong pedagogical and leadership competencies to ensure that learning processes are aligned with the diverse characteristics and needs of students.

The strengthening of the Guru Penggerak role is also reflected in the findings of a Community Service (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat) activity conducted in May 2025 at SDN Cakung Timur 01, East Jakarta. The activity revealed the perspectives of the school principal, a graduate of the Guru Penggerak Program who has obtained Guru Penggerakcertification. The principal emphasized the importance of addressing students' special needs and integrating technology and educational innovation as key strategies for improving learning quality. These findings indicate that the knowledge and skills possessed by Guru Penggerak contribute to the creation of more inclusive, motivating, and empowering learning environments that support students in developing their full potential (Pianda, 2018; Mustari, 2022).

In the era of disruption, characterized by rapid technological advancement and shifts in learning paradigms, higher education research faces increasingly complex challenges, particularly in examining the effectiveness of the Guru Penggerak role in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools. Research on the role of Guru Penggerak is therefore crucial to reveal their tangible contributions to the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to establish an education system that is more inclusive, adaptive to contemporary developments, and globally competitive through student-centered learning. Accordingly,

this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of Guru Penggerak as agents of change in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, while also offering theoretical and practical contributions to the development of educational policy and practice at the primary education level.

1.1. Study Objectives

This study aims to:

1. analyze the role of Guru Penggerak in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the primary school level, particularly in fostering student-centered learning practices;

2. identify the forms of instructional leadership demonstrated by Guru Penggerak in encouraging innovation, creativity, and reflective teaching within the school environment;

3. examine the strategies employed by Guru Penggerak in addressing diverse student learning needs, including the integration of differentiated instruction and inclusive educational approaches;

4. explore the challenges and barriers encountered by Guru Penggerak in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, both at the individual teacher level and within institutional contexts;

5. investigate the contribution of Guru Penggerak to the development of a collaborative and supportive school culture involving principals, teachers, students, and parents;

6. formulate recommendations for strengthening the Guru Penggerak program and related educational policies to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of Merdeka Curriculum implementation.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive phenomenological approach grounded in the social definition paradigm. This approach was selected because it enables the researcher to explore in depth the meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences of participants regarding the role of Guru Penggerak in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The phenomenological perspective positions participants' subjective experiences as the primary source for understanding social realities occurring in the educational context.

The research was conducted at SDN Cakung Timur 09 Pagi, Jakarta, Indonesia. Participants were determined through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) teachers who had officially obtained Guru Penggerak certification from cohorts 1–3, (2) actively involved in instructional practices at the school, and (3) willing to participate throughout the research process. The total number of participants consisted of five teachers, all of whom served as classroom teachers and had experience implementing student-centered learning. Demographically, the participants varied in teaching experience (6–18 years), age range (29–45 years), and educational background (Bachelor to Master level), providing diverse perspectives relevant to the research focus.

Data were collected through three techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations and interviews were conducted over three meetings within a two-month period, with each session lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. Observations focused on classroom practices, interaction patterns, and the application of Merdeka Curriculum principles. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants'

experiences, challenges, and strategies as Guru Penggerak. Documentation included lesson plans, school programs, and policy documents to support triangulation. Data saturation was determined when no new themes, concepts, or significant information emerged from subsequent interviews and observations. After the fifth participant, the data showed repetitive patterns and consistency across sources, indicating that the collected information was sufficient to answer the research objectives.

To ensure phenomenological validity and trustworthiness, several strategies were applied:

1) triangulation of data sources and techniques (interviews, observations, and documents);

2) member checking, where interview summaries were returned to participants for confirmation;

3) peer debriefing with fellow researchers to review interpretations; and

4) maintaining an audit trail documenting all research procedures.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The coding process was conducted in three stages:

1) open coding to identify meaningful units from interview transcripts;

2) axial coding to group similar codes into categories such as leadership practice, learning innovation, and challenges; and

3) selective coding to develop core themes that represent the essence of participants' experiences.

Theme development was performed iteratively by comparing data across participants and validating them through triangulation to enhance transparency and credibility.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Understanding of Guru Penggerak toward the Concept and Objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on the findings from interviews, observations, and field data analysis, a comprehensive picture emerged regarding Guru Penggerak's understanding of the concepts and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum at the primary education level. The results indicate that Guru Penggerak demonstrate a strong understanding of the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly student-centered learning, curricular flexibility, and the strengthening of character education and 21st-century competencies. Guru Penggerak consistently implement Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as a primary instructional strategy. This model is utilized to foster students' creativity, critical thinking skills, collaboration, and confidence in expressing ideas and opinions. Learning projects are designed in a contextual manner, grounded in real-life experiences, and relevant to students' daily lives. As a result, learning outcomes are not merely academic in nature but are also meaningful and applicable.

Furthermore, Guru Penggerak exhibit a strong understanding of the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teaching modules are treated as open guidelines that can be adapted to students' needs and the specific characteristics of the school. These adaptations include the selection of learning materials, instructional strategies,

and assessment forms, thereby making the learning process more adaptive and responsive to student diversity. The findings also reveal that Guru Penggerak have implemented differentiated learning through the use of various instructional media and methods. These strategies are tailored to students' interests, needs, and learning styles, ensuring that each learner has equal opportunities to develop according to their individual potential. In terms of technology integration, Guru Penggerak effectively incorporate digital media into the teaching and learning process. The instructional media developed are not only used individually but are also shared with colleagues, including senior teachers. This practice enhances digital literacy and strengthens teacher collaboration through the formation of professional learning communities.

The application of project-based learning has also contributed to increased student engagement in the learning process. Students are actively involved in exploration, collaboration, and problem-solving related to contextual issues. Learning is no longer solely focused on academic achievement but also emphasizes the development of communication skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Beyond the classroom, Guru Penggerak actively build professional networks through collaboration with fellow teachers and school principals. The Merdeka Teaching Platform (Platform Merdeka Mengajar) is utilized as a medium for sharing best practices, enhancing pedagogical competencies, and strengthening a culture of collaborative learning within the school environment. In addition, Guru Penggerak place strong emphasis on the development of students' character and social-emotional skills. The mentoring provided is not only aimed at improving academic understanding but also at instilling values such as responsibility, honesty, empathy, and independence as integral components of students' character formation.

Strategies of Guru Penggerak in optimizing the implementation of Merdeka curriculum in primary schools

The findings indicate that Guru Penggerak employ various implementative strategies to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools. These strategies encompass classroom instructional practices, the strengthening of the school environment, and the continuous development of teacher professionalism. Guru Penggerak actively create learning environments that are safe, comfortable, and inclusive for all students. By introducing innovative instructional ideas and demonstrating consistency in carrying out their responsibilities, Guru Penggerak are able to establish a positive classroom climate. Such conditions not only support students' academic development but also contribute significantly to their emotional and social growth.

Beyond classroom instruction, Guru Penggerak play a vital role in strengthening their colleagues' teaching practices. Cross-class collaboration and joint reflective activities serve as platforms for sharing experiences and enriching instructional strategies. These efforts foster an open, collaborative, and mutually inspiring learning culture within the school. Another key strategy identified is the active involvement of Guru Penggerak in professional discussion forums, such as home learning visits (home visit belajar). These forums function as spaces for teachers to exchange best practices, discuss instructional challenges, and jointly formulate solutions. Such collaboration not only strengthens interpersonal relationships among teachers but also enhances overall professional capacity and instructional quality.

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, Guru Penggerak ensure that the values of the Pancasila Student Profile are integrated into the learning process. Values such as honesty, responsibility, independence, and mutual

cooperation are embedded in learning materials and activities. This approach renders learning more meaningful, as it is oriented not only toward academic achievement but also toward students' character development. The results also reveal that Guru Penggerak possess a deep understanding of the substance of the Merdeka Curriculum, including the flexibility to design differentiated instruction based on students' needs. The autonomy provided for exploration fosters self-confidence and intrinsic motivation among Guru Penggerak to develop their competencies optimally. Consistently, Guru Penggerak strive to move away from conventional teaching approaches by applying methods that are more adaptive, contextual, and aligned with students' characteristics. Such instructional innovations enable learning objectives encompassing knowledge, skills, and character to be achieved in a more holistic manner.

The Strategic Role of Guru Penggerak in Fostering Learning Creativity within the Merdeka Curriculum

The findings further demonstrate that Guru Penggerak play a strategic role in fostering learning creativity in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the primary education level. This role is reflected in their ability to design and implement learning that is innovative, contextual, and student-centered. Learning creativity is understood not merely as a variation of teaching methods, but as teachers' capacity to create meaningful learning experiences that are relevant to students' lives. Guru Penggerak actively utilize the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum to develop learning strategies based on projects, exploration, and problem-solving. These approaches provide students with opportunities to think critically, express ideas, and produce creative outputs aligned with their interests and potentials. Such learning processes encourage active student engagement and enhance learning motivation.

Moreover, Guru Penggerak act as facilitators who cultivate learning environments that are safe, inclusive, and supportive of creative expression. Through differentiated instruction and the use of diverse learning media, Guru Penggerak accommodate variations in learning styles and students' needs. This strategy ensures that every student has equal opportunities to participate and develop optimally. The strategic role of Guru Penggerak is also evident in their efforts to strengthen teacher collaboration through the sharing of best practices and reflective learning activities. These initiatives contribute to the development of a culture of innovation within schools, allowing learning creativity to evolve not merely as an individual practice but as a collective movement in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary education.

3.2. Discussion

Understanding of *Guru Penggerak* toward the Concepts and Objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum

The findings of this study indicate that Guru Penggerak play a strategic role in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in a substantive and contextual manner. The application of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) reflects Guru Penggerak' efforts to create meaningful learning experiences oriented toward the development of 21st-century competencies. This learning model aligns with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize the strengthening of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills. Guru Penggerak' understanding of curriculum flexibility demonstrates that the Merdeka Curriculum is not perceived as a rigid document, but rather as a dynamic framework that can be adapted to students' needs and the school context.

This perspective reinforces the role of teachers as reflective and adaptive learning designers, rather than merely curriculum implementers.

The implementation of differentiated instruction by Guru Penggerak reflects the inclusive spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum. By valuing student diversity, learning becomes more equitable and oriented toward the development of individual potential. These findings affirm that Guru Penggerak play an essential role in creating learning environments that are supportive and empowering for all students. The integration of technology in learning, along with the strengthening of teacher collaboration, highlights the instructional leadership capacity of Guru Penggerak. Through the sharing of best practices and the establishment of learning communities, Guru Penggerak contribute to the development of a culture of lifelong learning within schools. Furthermore, Guru Penggerak' attention to students' social-emotional development and character education aligns with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum in fostering a holistic Pancasila Student Profile. Learning is directed not only toward academic achievement but also toward character formation, independence, and social responsibility. Overall, the results of this study confirm that Guru Penggerak not only understand the concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum at a theoretical level, but are also capable of implementing them in practice through innovative, adaptive, and transformative learning approaches. This role positions Guru Penggerak as key actors in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary education.

Strategies of Guru Penggerak in Optimizing the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Primary Schools

The findings further indicate that the strategies employed by Guru Penggerak contribute significantly to optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools. The creation of safe and supportive learning environments reflects Guru Penggerak' understanding of the importance of a positive psychological climate in facilitating effective learning processes. Teacher collaboration through joint reflection and professional discussion forums demonstrates the role of Guru Penggerak as agents of change and instructional leaders. Through active learning communities, the exchange of best practices promotes the collective enhancement of pedagogical competence and teacher professionalism. The integration of the Pancasila Student Profile values into learning activities illustrates that the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented not merely as a structural curriculum reform, but also as a character-building initiative. This approach aligns with national education goals that emphasize a balance between academic mastery and the strengthening of moral and social values. Guru Penggerak' understanding of curriculum flexibility and differentiated instruction reflects their adaptive capacity in responding to students' diverse learning needs. These strategies reinforce the principle of student-centered learning, which is a core emphasis of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Instructional innovation carried out by Guru Penggerak demonstrates their readiness to respond to the dynamics of educational change. By employing contextual and relevant approaches, learning processes become more meaningful and oriented toward the holistic development of students' potential. Overall, the strategies of Guru Penggerak in creating supportive learning environments, strengthening learning communities, integrating character values, and developing instructional innovations reflect a strong commitment to sustainable educational

transformation. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum through these strategies has a tangible impact on improving the quality of learning in primary schools.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that Guru Penggerak possess a comprehensive understanding of the concepts and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary education. This understanding is reflected in the implementation of student-centered learning, the effective use of curriculum flexibility, the application of differentiated instruction, and the integration of technology into the teaching and learning process. Guru Penggerak consistently apply Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as a primary instructional strategy to foster creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and students' confidence in expressing ideas. In addition to increasing active student engagement, this approach also contributes to the strengthening of character education and social-emotional skills in alignment with the development goals of the Pancasila Student Profile.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the implementative strategies employed by Guru Penggerak—including the creation of safe and supportive learning environments, the strengthening of teacher collaboration, the development of learning communities, and continuous instructional innovation—play a significant role in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Guru Penggerak act not only as curriculum implementers but also as agents of change and instructional leaders who foster a culture of innovation within schools. Therefore, Guru Penggerak hold a strategic role in enhancing the quality of learning and supporting sustainable educational transformation at the primary education level.

5. Suggestions for Future Research

1. Future studies are recommended to involve a larger and more diverse sample of Guru Penggerak from different regions and school contexts in order to obtain broader empirical evidence regarding variations in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. Subsequent research may employ a mixed-methods or longitudinal design to examine the long-term impact of Guru Penggerak's instructional leadership on students' academic achievement, character development, and social-emotional competencies.

3. Further investigation is needed to explore the effectiveness of specific instructional models, such as Project-Based Learning and differentiated instruction, in comparison with other pedagogical approaches within the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

4. Future researchers are encouraged to analyze the role of school leadership, organizational culture, and policy support in strengthening the sustainability of Guru Penggerak initiatives at the institutional level.

5. Additional studies should examine the challenges faced by novice teachers who have not yet joined the Guru Penggerak program, in comparison with certified Guru Penggerak, to identify gaps in professional development needs.

6. It is also suggested that future research investigate students' and parents' perspectives on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum to provide a more comprehensive and multi-stakeholder evaluation.

Declarations

Source of Funding

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests related to this work.

Consent for publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

Both the authors made an equal contribution in the Conception and design of the work, Data collection, Drafting the article, and Critical revision of the article.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable for this study.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable for this study.

Informed Consent

All participants in this study voluntarily gave their informed consent prior to their involvement in the research.

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